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THE INTERVIEW

From Neutral Stance to Political Involvement

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The movie *Memento* begins at the end, showing a killing and then backing up to the beginning scene by scene. We do not go that far here; after all, this is not a thriller but rather a chapter about interviewing. Yet we cut to the chase, beginning with the razor-edge state of interviewing and then backing up to the old days and progressing to our days through the chapter, with full knowledge of where we are going. If you think that this will spoil the ending, skip the first section and read it last.

We have no actual killing here, but metaphorically, traditional interviewing—as it is commonly understood—does get killed. The perpetrators (or liberators, depending on your point of view) are Kong, Mahoney, and Plummer (2002), the coauthors of “Queering the Interview.” They focus on the changing public perception of gays and lesbians in the United States during the past few decades and on how that changing perception altered the tone of interviewing those groups. Decades ago, when gays were “homosexuals,” the interview “was clearly an instrument of pathological diagnosis,” yet when the milieu became one of social reform, “the interview became a tool of

modernist democratization and ultimately of social reform” (p. 240).

What this tells us about interviewing is that it is inextricably and unavoidably historically, politically, and contextually bound. This boundedness refutes the whole tradition of the interview of gathering objective data to be used neutrally for scientific purposes. If *queering* the interview denies its primary goal, what should be done? We could reject interviewing altogether. That is hardly feasible in today’s society, which has been tabbed as “the interview society,” where everyone gets interviewed and gets a moment in the sun, even if only to reveal dastardly aberrations on the *Jerry Springer* show. We certainly do not want to trivialize the interview in the same way as the mass media have tended to do. What should we do? Very simply, some sociologists have turned the timetable and returned the scope of the interview to that of the predecessors of interactionism, the pragmatists, focusing on social amelioration. If the interview cannot be a neutral tool (and we will see that it never really was), why not turn it into a walking stick to help some people get on their feet? This is where the interview is now, and we outline this development next.

■ EMPATHETIC INTERVIEWING

"Empathetic" emphasizes taking a stance, contrary to the scientific image of interviewing, which is based on the concept of neutrality. Indeed, much of traditional interviewing concentrates on the language of scientific neutrality and the techniques to achieve it. Unfortunately, these goals are largely mythical.

As many have argued convincingly (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997; Fontana, 2002; Hertz, 1997b; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Scheurich, 1995), interviewing is not merely the neutral exchange of asking questions and getting answers. Two (or more) people are involved in this process, and their exchanges lead to the creation of a collaborative effort called *the interview*. The key here is the "active" nature of this process (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995) that leads to a contextually bound and mutually created story—the interview. Some have highlighted the problematics of the interview. Atkinson and Silverman (1997) drew attention to the asymmetric nature of the interview and to the fact that the final product is a pastiche that is put together by fiat. Scheurich (1995) observed that the interviewer is a person, historically and contextually located, carrying unavoidable conscious and unconscious motives, desires, feelings, and biases—hardly a neutral tool. Scheurich maintained, "The conventional, positivist view of interviewing vastly underestimates the complexity, uniqueness, and indeterminateness of each one-to-one human interaction" (p. 241).

If we proceed from the belief that neutrality is not possible (even assuming that it would be desirable), then taking a stance becomes unavoidable. An increasing number of social scientists have realized that they need to interact as persons with the interviewees and acknowledge that they are doing so. Long ago, Douglas (1985) advocated revealing personal feelings and private situations to the interviewee as a quid pro quo of good faith. Yet Douglas, despite his openness, still placed primary importance on the traditional notion of obtaining better and more comprehensive responses; he failed to see that his openness was merely a technique to persuade the interviewee

to reveal more and be more honest in his or her responses.

New empathetic approaches in interviewing differ from the conventional approach; they see that it is time to stop treating the interviewee as a "clockwork orange," that is, looking for a better juicer (techniques) to squeeze the juice (answers) out of the orange (living person/interviewee). Scheurich (1995) concurred: "The modernist representation is not sheer fabrication, but all of the juice of the lived experience has been squeezed out" (p. 241). The new empathetic approaches take an ethical stance in favor of the individual or group being studied. The interviewer becomes an advocate and partner in the study, hoping to be able to use the results to advocate social policies and ameliorate the conditions of the interviewee. The preference is to study oppressed and underdeveloped groups.

Kong and colleagues (2002), as mentioned earlier, showed that the change toward empathy might not be so much of an individual decision as it is the result of changing historical, political, and cultural perspectives. They discussed changes in interviewing regarding same-sex experiences. They showed that during the past few decades, as Americans underwent a profound change from "homosexuals" to "gays," *"the sensibilities of interviewing are altered with the changing social phenomena that constitute the 'interview'"* (p. 240, italics in original). Thus, interviews changed from "instruments of pathological diagnosis" (p. 240) to become much more humanized in the wake of social reform. Interviews became "a methodology of friendship" (p. 254). Kong and colleagues concluded that the interview is bound in historical, political, and cultural moments and that as those moments change, so does the interview. The work by these three coauthors was radical in that it collapsed decades of alleged "objective interview findings." As they clearly stated, framing the interview within specific parameters (i.e., "We are interviewing pathological, sick, deviant individuals" vs. "We are interviewing individuals who should not be ostracized because of their diverse sexual sensibilities") will lead to entirely different results. These results will be anything but neutral;

they will be politically laden and used for or against the group studied.

Researchers have strongly emphasized the removal of barriers between the interviewer and the interviewee in the process of interviewing women. Many female researchers advocate a partnership between the researcher and respondents, who should work together to create a narrative—the interview—that could be beneficial to the group studied. Most researchers address factors beyond that of gender. Hertz and Ferguson (1997) addressed the plight of single mothers—both heterosexuals and lesbians. Weston (1998) also attended to groups of same-sex preferences in academia. Collins (1990) added the element of being black to that of being female. Denzin (2003a, 2003b) extended the interest in amelioration of oppressed groups to that in reporting the results of the study. He maintained that traditional reporting modes are ill equipped to capture the attention and hearts of the readers (see also Behar, 1996). Denzin (2003a) issued a “manifesto” calling for performance ethnography: “We need to explore performance ethnography as a vehicle for enacting a performative cultural politics of hope” (p. 202).

Some researchers are becoming keenly attuned to the fact that in knowing “others,” we come to know “ourselves.” Holstein and Gubrium (1995) urged researchers to be reflexive not only about *what* the interview accomplishes but also about *how* the interview is accomplished, thereby uncovering the ways in which we go about creating a text. Wasserfall (1993) noted that even when the researcher and respondents are women, if there is a discordant view of the world (in her study, a political one), there is a great divide between the two. She added that, despite claims to “friendship and cooperation,” it is the researcher who ultimately cuts and pastes together the narrative, choosing what will become a part of it and what will be cut. Similarly, El-Or (1992) pointed to a gap between the researcher and respondents created by religious differences (in her study, when a nonreligious ethnographer studies an ultra-orthodox group). El-Or also reflexively addressed the notion of “friendship” between the

researcher and respondents and concluded that it is fleeting and somewhat illusory: “We can’t be friends because she [the respondent] was the object and we both know it” (p. 71). Atkinson and Silverman (1997) also emphasized self-restraint and self-reflexivity in warning that researchers should not replace a false god (the authorial monologue of classical sociology) with another (the monologue of a privileged speaking respondent). Researchers should not privilege any ways of looking at the world or at a particular technique but should instead continue to question, question, and question.

Atkinson and Silverman’s (1997) chilly warning can be turned on the proponents of the empathetic approach because they strongly privilege a method of inquiry over all others. Yet as Denzin (2003a) observed, “Symbolic interactionism is at a crossroad. We need to reclaim the progressive heritage given to us by DuBois, Mead, Dewey, and Blumer” (p. 202). As Fontana (2003) pointed out, perhaps Denzin (and we could add all of the others) is being a postmodern Don Quixote in his approach, yet the windmills of racism, sexism, and ageism are not mere shadows in our minds; rather, they are very real and very oppressive. The empathetic approach is not merely a “method of friendship”; it is a method of morality because it attempts to restore the sacredness of humans before addressing any theoretical or methodological concerns.

We too have “queered” the chapter to follow by framing it in the light of today’s development and new awareness in interviewing. Let us turn the time back and see how interviewing has come to be where it is.

■ INTERVIEWING IN PERSPECTIVE

Asking questions and getting answers is a much harder task that it may seem at first. The spoken or written word always has a residue of ambiguity, no matter how carefully we word the questions and how carefully we report or code the answers. Yet interviewing is one of the most common and powerful ways in which we try to understand our

fellow humans. Interviewing includes a wide variety of forms and a multiplicity of uses. The most common form of interviewing involves individual, face-to-face verbal interchange, but interviewing can also take the form of face-to-face group interchange and telephone surveys. It can be structured, semistructured, or unstructured. Interviewing can be used for marketing research, political opinion polling, therapeutic reasons, or academic analysis. It can be used for the purpose of measurement, or its scope can be the understanding of an individual or a group perspective. An interview can be a one-time brief exchange, such as 5 minutes over the telephone, or it can take place over multiple lengthy sessions, at times spanning days as in life history interviewing.

The use of interviewing to acquire information is so extensive today that it has been said that we live in an "interview society" (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997; Silverman, 1993). Increasingly, qualitative researchers are realizing that interviews are not neutral tools of data gathering but rather active interactions between two (or more) people leading to negotiated, contextually based results. Thus, the focus of interviews is moving to encompass the *hows* of people's lives (the constructive work involved in producing order in everyday life) as well as the traditional *whats* (the activities of everyday life) (Cicourel, 1964; Dingwall, 1997; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997, 1998; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Kvale, 1996; Sarup, 1996; Seidman, 1991; Silverman, 1993, 1997a). Interviews are moving toward new electronic forms and have seen a return to the pragmatic ideal of political involvement.

In this chapter, after discussing the interview society, we examine interviews by beginning with structured methods of interviewing and gradually moving to more qualitative types, examining interviews as negotiated texts and ending with electronic interviews and new trends in interviewing. We begin by briefly outlining the history of interviewing and then turn to a discussion of the academic uses of interviewing. Although the focus of this volume is qualitative research, to demonstrate the full import of interviewing, we need to discuss the major types of interviewing

(structured, group, and unstructured) as well as other ways in which to conduct interviews. One caveat is that, in discussing the various interview methods, we use the language and rationales employed by practitioners of these methods; we note our differences with these practitioners and our criticisms later in the chapter in our discussion of gendered and other new types of qualitative interviewing. Following our examination of structured interviewing, we address in detail the various elements of qualitative interviewing. We then discuss the problems related to gendered interviewing, as well as issues of interpretation and reporting, as we broach some considerations related to ethical issues. Finally, we note some of the new trends in qualitative interviewing.

■ THE INTERVIEW SOCIETY

Before embarking on our journey through interviewing *per se*, we comment briefly on the tremendous reliance on interviewing in the U.S. society today. This reliance on interviewing has reached such a level that a number of scholars have referred to the United States as "the interview society" (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997; Silverman, 1993).

Both qualitative and quantitative researchers tend to rely on the interview as the basic method of data gathering whether the purpose is to obtain a rich, in-depth experiential account of an event or episode in the life of the respondent or to garner a simple point on a scale of 2 to 10 dimensions. There is inherent faith that the results are trustworthy and accurate and that the relation of the interviewer to the respondent that evolves during the interview process has not unduly biased the account (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997; Silverman, 1993). The commitment to, and reliance on, the interview to produce narrative experience reflects and reinforces the view of the United States as an interview society.

It seems that everyone—not just social researchers—relies on the interview as a source of information, with the assumption that interviewing results is a true and accurate picture of

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the respondents' selves and lives. One cannot escape being interviewed; interviews are everywhere in the form of political polls, questionnaires about visits to doctors, housing applications, forms regarding social service eligibility, college applications, talk shows, news programs—the list goes on and on. The interview as a means of data gathering is no longer limited to use by social science researchers and police detectives; it is a “universal mode of systematic inquiry” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 1). It seems that nearly any type of question—whether personal, sensitive, probing, upsetting, or accusatory—is fair game and permissible in the interview setting. Nearly all interviews, no matter their purposes (and these can be varied—to describe, to interrogate, to assist, to test, to evaluate, etc.), seek various forms of biographical description. As Gubrium and Holstein (1998) noted, the interview has become a means of contemporary storytelling in which persons divulge life accounts in response to interview inquiries. The media have been especially adept at using this technique.

As a society, we rely on the interview and, by and large, take it for granted. The interview and the norms surrounding the enactment of the respondent and researcher roles have evolved to the point where they are institutionalized and no longer require extensive training; rules and roles are known and shared. (However, there is a growing group of individuals who increasingly question the traditional assumptions of the interview, and we address their concerns later in our discussion of gendered interviewing and new trends in interviewing.) Many practitioners continue to use and take for granted traditional interviewing techniques. It is as if interviewing is now part of the mass culture, so that it has actually become the most feasible mechanism for obtaining information about individuals, groups, and organizations in a society characterized by individuation, diversity, and specialized role relations. Thus, many believe that it is not necessary to “reinvent the wheel” for each interview situation given that “interviewing has become a routine technical practice and a pervasive, taken-for-granted activity in our culture” (Mishler, 1986, p. 23).

This is not to say, however, that the interview is so technical and the procedures are so standardized that interviewers can ignore contextual, societal, and interpersonal elements. Each interview context is one of interaction and relation, and the result is as much a product of this social dynamic as it is the product of accurate accounts and replies. The interview has become a routine and nearly unnoticed part of everyday life. Yet response rates continue to decline, indicating that fewer people are willing to disclose their “selves” or that they are so burdened by requests for interviews that they are much more selective in their choices of which interviews to grant. Social scientists are more likely to recognize, however, that interviews are interactional encounters and that the nature of the social dynamic of the interview can shape the nature of the knowledge generated. Interviewers with less training and experience than social scientists might not recognize when interview participants are “actively” constructing knowledge around questions and responses (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

We now turn to a brief history of interviewing to frame its roots and development.

■ THE HISTORY OF INTERVIEWING

At least one form of interviewing or another has been with us for a very long time. Even ancient Egyptians conducted population censuses (Babbie, 1992). During more recent times, the tradition of interviewing evolved from two trends. First, interviewing found great popularity and widespread use in clinical diagnosis and counseling where the concern was with the quality of responses. Second, during World War I, interviewing came to be widely employed in psychological testing, with the emphasis being on measurement (Maccoby & Maccoby, 1954).

The individual generally credited with being the first to develop a social survey relying on interviewing was Charles Booth (Converse, 1987). In 1886, Booth embarked on a comprehensive survey of the economic and social conditions of the people of London, published as *Life and Labour of*

the People in London (Booth, 1902–1903). In his early study, Booth embodied what were to become separate interviewing methods because he not only implemented survey research but also triangulated his work by relying on unstructured interviews and ethnographic observations:

The data were checked and supplemented by visits to many neighborhoods, streets, and homes, and by conferences with various welfare and community leaders. From time to time Booth lived as a lodger in districts where he was not known, so that he could become more intimately acquainted with the lives and habits of the poorer classes. (Parten, 1950, pp. 6–7)

Many other surveys of London and other English cities followed, patterned after Booth's example. In the United States, a similar pattern ensued. In 1895, a study attempted to do in Chicago what Booth had done in London (Converse, 1987). In 1896, the American sociologist W. E. B. DuBois, who admittedly was following Booth's lead, studied the black population of Philadelphia (DuBois, 1899). Surveys of cities and small towns followed, with the most notable among them being the Lynds' *Middletown* (Lynd & Lynd, 1929) and *Middletown in Transition* (Lynd & Lynd, 1937).

Opinion polling was another early form of interviewing. Some polling took place well before the start of the 20th century, but it really came into its own in 1935 with the forming of the American Institute of Public Opinion by George Gallup. Preceding Gallup, in both psychology and sociology during the 1920s, there was a movement toward the study (and usually the measurement) of attitudes. W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki used the documentary method to introduce the study of attitudes in social psychology. Thomas's influence along with that of Robert Park, a former reporter who believed that sociology was to be found out in the field, sparked a number of community studies at the University of Chicago that came to be known collectively as the works of the Chicago School. Many other researchers, such as Albion Small, George H. Mead, E. W. Burgess, Everett C. Hughes,

Louis Wirth, W. Lloyd Warner, and Anselm Strauss, were also greatly influential (for a recent discussion of the relations and influence of various Chicago School members, see Becker, 1999).

Although the members of the Chicago School are reputed to have used the ethnographic method in their inquiries, some disagree and have noted that many of the Chicago School studies lacked the analytic component of modern-day ethnography and so were, at best, "firsthand descriptive studies" (Harvey, 1987, p. 50). Regardless of the correct label for the Chicago School members' fieldwork, they clearly relied on a combination of observation, personal documents, and informal interviews in their studies. Interviews were especially in evidence in the work of Thrasher (1927/1963), who in his study of gang members relied primarily on some 130 qualitative interviews, and in that of Anderson (1923), whose classic study of hobos relied on informal in-depth conversations.

It was left to Herbert Blumer and his former student, Howard Becker, to formalize and give impetus to sociological ethnography during the 1950s and 1960s, and interviewing began to lose both the eclectic flavor given to it by Booth and the qualitative accent of the Chicago School members. Understanding gang members or hobos through interviews lost importance; instead, what became relevant was the use of interviewing in survey research as a tool to quantify data. This was not new given that opinion polls and market research had been doing it for years. But during World War II, there was a tremendous increase in survey research as the U.S. armed forces hired great numbers of sociologists as survey researchers. More than a half million American soldiers were interviewed in one manner or another (Young, 1966), and their mental and emotional lives were reported in a four-volume survey, *Studies in Social Psychology in World War II*, the first two volumes of which were directed by Samuel Stouffer and titled *The American Soldier*. This work had tremendous impact and led the way to widespread use of systematic survey research.

What was new, however, was that quantitative survey research moved into academia and came

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to dominate sociology as the method of choice for the next three decades. An Austrian immigrant, Paul Lazarsfeld, spearheaded this move. He welcomed *The American Soldier* with great enthusiasm. In fact, Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton edited a book of reflections on *The American Soldier* (Merton & Lazarsfeld, 1950). Lazarsfeld moved to Columbia in 1940, taking with him his market research and other applied grants, and he became instrumental in directing the Bureau of Applied Social Research. Two other "survey organizations" were also formed: the National Opinion Research Center (formed in 1941 by Harry Field, first at the University of Denver and then at the University of Chicago) and the Survey Research Center (formed in 1946 by Rensis Likert and his group at the University of Michigan).

Academia at the time was dominated by theoretical concerns, and there was some resistance toward this applied, numbers-based kind of sociology. Sociologists and other humanists were critical of Lazarsfeld and the other survey researchers. Herbert Blumer, C. Wright Mills, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and Pitirin Sorokin were among those who voiced their displeasure. According to Converse (1987), Sorokin felt that "the new emphasis on quantitative work was obsessive, and he called the new practitioners 'quantophrenics'—with special reference to Stouffer and Lazarsfeld" (p. 253). Converse also quoted Mills: "Those in the grip of the methodological inhibition often refuse to say anything about modern society unless it has been through the fine little mill of the Statistical Ritual" (p. 252). Converse noted that Schlesinger called the survey researchers "social relations hucksters" (p. 253).

But the survey researchers also had powerful allies such as Merton, who joined the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia in 1943, and government monies were becoming increasingly available for survey research. The 1950s saw a growth of survey research in the universities and a proliferation of survey research texts. Gradually, survey research increased its domain over sociology, culminating in 1960 with the election of Lazarsfeld to the presidency of the American Sociological Association. The methodological

dominance of survey research continued unabated throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, although other methods began to erode the prominence of survey research.

Qualitative interviewing continued to be practiced hand in hand with participant observation methods, but it too assumed some of the quantifiable scientific rigor that preoccupied survey research to a great extent. This was especially visible in grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), with its painstaking emphasis on coding data, and in ethnomethodology, with its quest for invariant properties of social action (Cicourel, 1970). Other qualitative researchers suggested variations. Lofland (1971) criticized grounded theory for paying too little attention to data-gathering techniques. Douglas (1985) suggested lengthy, existential one-on-one interviews that lasted at least 1 day. Spradley (1980) tried to clarify the difference between ethnographic observation and ethnographic interviewing.

Recently, postmodernist ethnographers have concerned themselves with some of the assumptions present in interviewing and with the controlling role of the interviewer. These concerns have led to new directions in qualitative interviewing focusing on increased attention to the voices of the respondents (Marcus & Fischer, 1986), the interviewer–respondent relationship (Crapanzano, 1980), the importance of the researcher's gender in interviewing (Gluck & Patai, 1991), and the role of other elements such as race, social status, and age (Seidman, 1991).

Platt (2002), in her recent chapter on the history of interviewing, correctly noted that the interview encompasses so many different practices that it is extremely hard to derive meaningful generalization about it and that the changes that have taken place over time are driven partly by methodological concerns and partly by sociopolitical motives.

■ STRUCTURED INTERVIEWING

In structured interviewing, the interviewer asks all respondents the same series of preestablished

questions with a limited set of response categories. There is generally little room for variation in response except where open-ended questions (which are infrequent) may be used. The interviewer records the responses according to a coding scheme that has already been established by the project director or research supervisor. The interviewer controls the pace of the interview by treating the questionnaire as if it were a theatrical script to be followed in a standardized and straightforward manner. Thus, all respondents receive the same set of questions asked in the same order or sequence by an interviewer who has been trained to treat every interview situation in a like manner. There is very little flexibility in the way in which questions are asked or answered in the structured interview setting. Instructions to interviewers often include some of the following guidelines:

- Never get involved in long explanations of the study; use the standard explanation provided by the supervisor.
- Never deviate from the study introduction, sequence of questions, or question wording.
- Never let another person interrupt the interview; do not let another person answer for the respondent or offer his or her opinion on the question.
- Never suggest an answer or agree or disagree with an answer. Do not give the respondent any idea of your personal views on the topic of the question or survey.
- Never interpret the meaning of a question; just repeat the question and give instructions or clarifications that are provided in training or by the supervisor.
- Never improvise such as by adding answer categories or making wording changes.

Telephone interviews, face-to-face interviews in households, intercept interviews in malls and parks, and interviews generally associated with survey research are most likely to be included in the structured interview category.

This interview context calls for the interviewer to play a neutral role, never interjecting his or her opinion of a respondent's answer. The interviewer

must establish what has been called "balanced rapport"; he or she must be casual and friendly, on the one hand, but must be directive and impersonal, on the other. The interviewer must perfect a style of "interested listening" that rewards the respondent's participation but does not evaluate these responses (Converse & Schuman, 1974).

It is hoped that in a structured interview, nothing is left to chance. However, response effects, or nonsampling errors, that can be attributed to the questionnaire administration process commonly evolve from three sources. The first source of error is respondent behavior. The respondent may deliberately try to please the interviewer or to prevent the interviewer from learning something about him or her. To do this, the respondent will embellish a response, give what is described as a "socially desirable" response, or omit certain relevant information (Bradburn, 1983, p. 291). The respondent may also err due to faulty memory. The second source of error is found in the nature of the task, that is, the method of questionnaire administration (face-to-face or telephone) or the sequence or wording of the questions. The third source of error is the interviewer, whose characteristics or questioning techniques might impede proper communication of the question (Bradburn, 1983). It is the degree of error assigned to the interviewer that is of greatest concern.

Most structured interviews leave little room for the interviewer to improvise or exercise independent judgment, but even in the most structured interview situation, not every contingency can be anticipated and not every interviewer behaves according to the script (Bradburn, 1983; Frey, 1989). In fact, a study of interviewer effects found that interviewers changed the wording of as many as one third of the questions (Bradburn, Sudman, & Associates, 1979).

In general, research on interviewer effects has shown interviewer characteristics such as age, gender, and interviewing experience to have a relatively small impact on responses (Singer & Presser, 1989). However, there is some evidence to show that student interviewers produce a larger response effect than do nonstudent interviewers,

higher status interviewers produce a larger response effect than do lower status interviewers, and the race of interviewers makes a difference only on questions specifically related to race (Bradburn, 1983; Hyman, 1954; Singer, Frankel, & Glassman, 1983).

The relatively minor impact of the interviewer on response quality in structured interview settings is directly attributable to the inflexible, standardized, and predetermined nature of this type of interviewing. There is simply little room for error. However, those who are advocates of structured interviewing are not unaware that the interview is a social interaction context and that it is influenced by that context. Good interviewers recognize this fact and are sensitive to how interaction can influence response. Converse and Schuman (1974) observed, "There is no single interview style that fits every occasion or all respondents" (p. 53). This means that interviewers must be aware of respondent differences and must be able to make the proper adjustments called for by unanticipated developments. As Gorden (1992) stated, "Interviewing skills are not simple motor skills like riding a bicycle; rather, they involve a high-order combination of observation, emphatic sensitivity, and intellectual judgment" (p. 7).

It is not enough to understand the mechanics of interviewing; it is also important to understand the respondent's world and forces that might stimulate or retard responses (Kahn & Cannell, 1957). Still, the structured interview proceeds under a stimulus-response format, assuming that the respondent will truthfully answer questions previously determined to reveal adequate indicators of the variable in question so long as those questions are phrased properly. This kind of interview often elicits rational responses, but it overlooks or inadequately assesses the emotional dimension.

Developments in computer-assisted interviewing (Couper et al., 1998) have called into question the division between traditional modes of interviewing such as the survey interview and the mail survey. Singleton and Straits (2002) noted that today we are really looking at a continuum of data-collecting methods rather than

clearly divided methods; in fact, as these authors observed, many surveys today incorporate a variety of data-gathering methods driven by concerns such as time constraints, financial demands, and other practical elements.

■ GROUP INTERVIEWING

The group interview is essentially a qualitative data-gathering technique that relies on the systematic questioning of several individuals simultaneously in a formal or informal setting. Thus, this technique straddles the line between formal and informal interviewing.

The use of the group interview has ordinarily been associated with marketing research under the label of *focus group*, where the purpose is to gather consumer opinions on product characteristics, advertising themes, and/or service delivery. This format has also been used to a considerable extent by political parties and candidates who are interested in voter reactions to issues and policies. The group interview has also been used in sociological research. Bogardus (1926) tested his social distance scale during the mid-1920s, Zuckerman (1972) interviewed Nobel laureates, Thompson and Demerath (1952) looked at management problems in the military, Morgan and Spanish (1984) studied health issues, Fontana and Frey (1990) investigated reentry into the older worker labor force, and Merton and his associates studied the impact of propaganda using group interviews (see Frey & Fontana, 1991). In fact, Merton, Fiske, and Kendall (1956) coined the term "focus group" to apply to a situation where the researcher/interviewer asks very specific questions about a topic after having completed considerable research. There is also some evidence that established anthropologists such as Malinowski used this technique but did not report it (Frey & Fontana, 1991). Today, all group interviews are generically designated *focus group* interviews, even though there is considerable variation in the nature and types of group interviews.

In a group interview, the interviewer/moderator directs the inquiry and the interaction among

respondents in a very structured fashion or in a very unstructured manner, depending on the interviewer's purpose. The purpose may be exploratory; for example, the researcher may bring several persons together to test a methodological technique, to try out a definition of a research problem, or to identify key informants. An extension of the exploratory intent is to use the group interview for the purpose of pretesting questionnaire wording, measurement scales, or other elements of a survey design. This is now quite common in survey research (Desvousges & Frey, 1989). Group interviews can also be used successfully to aid respondents' recall or to stimulate embellished descriptions of specific events (e.g., a disaster, a celebration) or experiences shared by members of the group. Group interviews can also be used for triangulation purposes or used in conjunction with other data-gathering techniques. For example, group interviews could be helpful in the process of "indefinite triangulation" by putting individual responses into a context (Cicourel, 1974). Finally, phenomenological purposes may be served whether group interviews are the sole basis for gathering data or are used in association with other techniques.

Group interviews take different forms, depending on their purposes. They can be brainstorming interviews with little or no structure or direction from the interviewer, or they can be very structured such as those in nominal/delphi and marketing focus groups. In the latter cases, the role of the interviewer is very prominent and directive. Fieldwork settings provide both formal and informal occasions for group interviews. The field researcher can bring respondents into a formal setting in the field context and ask very directed questions. Or, a natural field setting, such as a street corner or a neighborhood tavern, can be conducive to casual but purposive inquiries.

Group interviews can be compared on several dimensions. First, the interviewer can be very formal, taking a very directive and controlling posture, guiding discussion strictly, and not permitting digression or variation from topic or agenda. This is the mode of focus and

nominal/delphi groups. In the latter case, participants are physically isolated but share views through a coordinator/interviewer. The nondirective approach is more likely to be implemented in a naturally established field setting (e.g., a street corner) or in a controlled setting (e.g., a research laboratory) where the research purpose is phenomenological to establish the widest range of meaning and interpretation for the topic. Groups can also be differentiated by question format and purpose, which in the case of group interviews usually means exploration, phenomenological, or pretest purposes. Exploratory interviews are designed to establish familiarity with a topic or setting; the interviewer can be very directive (or the opposite), but the questions are usually unstructured or open-ended. The same format is used in interviews with phenomenological purposes, where the intent is to tap intersubjective meaning with depth and diversity. Pretest interviews are generally structured in a question format, with the interview being directive in style. Table 27.1 compares the types of group interviews on various dimensions.

The skills that are required to conduct the group interview are not significantly different from those needed for the individual interview. The interviewer must be flexible, objective, empathetic, persuasive, a good listener, and so forth. But the group interview does present some problems not found in the individual interview. Merton and colleagues (1956) noted three specific problems, namely, that (a) the interviewer must keep one person or small coalition of persons from dominating the group, (b) the interviewer must encourage recalcitrant respondents to participate, and (c) the interviewer must obtain responses from the entire group to ensure the fullest coverage of the topic. In addition, the interviewer must balance the directive interviewer role with the role of moderator, and this calls for management of the dynamics of the group being interviewed. Furthermore, the group interviewer must simultaneously worry about the script of questions and be sensitive to the evolving patterns of group interaction.

Group interviews have some advantages over individual interviews, namely, that (a) they are

Table 27.1. Types of Group Interviews and Dimensions

<i>Type</i>	<i>Setting Purpose</i>	<i>Role of Interviewer</i>	<i>Question Format</i>	<i>Purpose</i>
Focus group	Formal, preset	Directive	Structured	Exploratory, pretest
Brainstorming	Formal or informal	Nondirective	Unstructured	Exploratory
Nominal/Delphi exploratory	Formal	Directive	Structured	Exploratory, pretest
Field, natural	Informal, spontaneous	Moderately nondirective	Very unstructured	Exploratory Phenomenological
Field, formal	Preset In field	Somewhat directive	Semistructured	Phenomenological

Source: Frey and Fontana (1991, p.184).

relatively inexpensive to conduct and often produce rich data that are cumulative and elaborative, (b) they can be stimulating for respondents and so aid in recall, and (c) the format is flexible. Group interviews are not, however, without problems. The results cannot be generalized, the emerging group culture may interfere with individual expression (a group can be dominated by one person), and “groupthink” is a possible outcome. The requirements for interviewer skills are greater than those for individual interviewing because of the group dynamics that are present. Nevertheless, the group interview is a viable option by both qualitative and quantitative research.

Morgan (2002) advocated a systematic approach to focus group interviewing so as to create a methodological continuity and the ability to assess the outcomes of focus group research. Morgan suggested that, just as social scientists were originally inspired to use focus groups by the example of marketing, it might be time to look at marketing again to see what is being done and use the marketing example to innovate in the field of social sciences.

■ UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEWING

Unstructured interviewing can provide greater breadth than do the other types given its qualitative

nature. In this section, we discuss the traditional type of unstructured interview—the open-ended, in-depth (ethnographic) interview. Many qualitative researchers differentiate between in-depth (ethnographic) interviewing and participant observation. Yet, as Lofland (1971) pointed out, the two go hand in hand, and much of the data gathered in participant observation come from informal interviewing in the field. Consider the following report from Malinowski’s (1967/1989) diary:

Saturday 8 [December 1917]. Got up late, felt rotten, took enema. At about 1 I went out; I heard cries; [people from] Kapwapu were bringing *uri* to Teyava. I sat with the natives, talked, took pictures. Went back. Billy corrected and supplemented my notes about *wasi*. At Teyava, an old man talked a great deal about fishes, but I did not understand him too well. Then we moved to his *bwayama*. Talked about *lili’u*. They kept questioning me about the war—In the evening I talked to the policeman about *bwaga’u*, *lili’u*, and *yoyova*. I was irritated by their laughing. Billy again told me a number of interesting things. Took quinine and calomel. (p. 145)

Malinowski’s (1967/1989) “day in the field” shows how very important unstructured interviewing is in the conduct of fieldwork and clearly illustrates the difference between structured interviewing and unstructured interviewing.

Malinowski had some general topics he wanted to know about, but he did not use close-ended questions or a formal approach to interviewing. What is more, he committed (as most fieldworkers do) what structured interviewers would see as two “capital offenses.” First, he answered questions asked by the respondents. Second, he let his personal feelings influence him (as all fieldworkers do); thus, he deviated from the “ideal” of a cool, distant, and rational interviewer.

Malinowski's example captures the difference in structured versus unstructured interviewing. The former aims at capturing precise data of a codable nature so as to explain behavior within preestablished categories, whereas the latter attempts to understand the complex behavior of members of society without imposing any a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry.

In a way, Malinowski's interviewing is still structured to some degree; there is a setting, there are identified informants, and the respondents are clearly discernible. In other types of interviewing, there might be no setting; for instance, Hertz (1995, 1997b, 1997c) focused on locating women in a historic moment rather than in a place. In addition, in their study of single mothers, Hertz and Ferguson (1997) interviewed women who did not know each other and who were not part of a single group or village. At times, informants are not readily accessible or identifiable, but anyone the researcher meets may become a valuable source of information. Hertz and Ferguson relied on tradespeople and friends to identify single mothers in the study. Fontana and Smith (1989) found that respondents were not always readily identifiable. In studying Alzheimer's disease patients, they discovered that it was often possible to confuse caregivers and patients during the early stages of the disease. Also, in Fontana's (1977) research on the poor elderly, the researcher had no fixed setting at all; he simply wandered from bench to bench in the park where the old folks were sitting, talking to any disheveled old person who would talk back.

Spradley (1979) aptly differentiated among various types of interviewing. He described the following interviewer–respondent interaction,

which would be unthinkable in traditional sociological circles yet is the very essence of unstructured interviewing—the establishment of a human-to-human relation with the respondent and the desire to *understand* rather than to *explain*:

Presently she smiled, pressed her hand to her chest, and said: “Tsetchwe.” It was her name. “Elizabeth,” I said, pointing to myself. “Nisabe,” she answered. . . . Then, having surely suspected that I was a woman, she put her hand on my breast gravely, and, finding out that I was, she touched her own breast. Many Bushmen do this; to them all Europeans look alike. “Tasu si” (women), she said. Then after a moment's pause, Tsetchwe began to teach me. (pp. 3–4)

Spradley (1979) went on to discuss all of the things that an interviewer learns from the natives—their culture, their language, their ways of life. Although each and every study is different, these are some of the basic elements of unstructured interviewing. These elements have been discussed in detail already, and we need not elaborate on them too much here (for detailed accounts of unstructured interviewing, see Adams & Preiss, 1960; Lofland, 1971; Spradley, 1979). Here we provide brief synopses. Remember that these are presented only as heuristic devices; every study uses slightly different elements and often in different combinations.

It is important to keep in mind that the following description of interviewing is highly modernistic in that it presents a structured format and definite steps to be followed. In a way, it mimics structured interviewing in an attempt to “scientize” the research, albeit by using very different steps and concerns. Later in this chapter, in discussing new trends, we deconstruct these notions as we frame the interview as an active emergent process. We contend that our interview society gives people instructions on how to comply with these heuristics (Silverman, 1993, 1997a, 1997b). Similarly, Scheurich (1995, 1997) was openly critical of both positivistic and interpretive interviewing because they are based on modernistic assumptions. For Scheurich (1997), rather than being a process

"by the numbers," interviewing (and its language) is "persistently slippery, unstable, and ambiguous from person to person, from situation to situation, from time to time" (p. 62).

Although postmodern researchers follow Scheurich, more traditional sociologists and researchers from other disciplines still follow this "how to" approach to interviewing, where the illusion exists that the better they execute the various steps, the better they will apprehend the reality that they assume is out there, ready to be plucked.

Accessing the Setting. How do we "get in"? That, of course, varies according to the group that one is attempting to study. One might have to disrobe and casually stroll in the nude if he or she is doing a study of nude beaches (Douglas, Rasmussen, & Flanagan, 1977), or one might have to buy a huge motorbike and frequent seedy bars in certain locations if he or she is attempting to befriend and study the Hell's Angels (Thompson, 1985). The different ways and attempts to get in vary tremendously, but they all share the common goal of gaining access to the setting. Sometimes there is no setting per se, as when Fontana (1977) attempted to study the poor elderly on the streets and had to gain access anew with each and every interviewee.

Understanding the Language and Culture of the Respondents. Wax (1960) gave perhaps the most poignant description of learning the language and culture of the respondents in her study of "disloyal" Japanese in concentration camps in America between 1943 and 1945. Wax had to overcome a number of language and cultural problems in her study. Although respondents may be fluent in the language of the interviewer, there are different ways of saying things—or indeed, certain things that should not be said at all—linking language and cultural manifestations. Wax made this point:

I remarked that I would like to see the letter. The silence that fell on the chatting group was almost palpable, and the embarrassment of the hosts was painful to see. The *faux pas* was not asking to see a letter, for letters were passed about rather freely. It rested on the fact that one did not give a Caucasian a letter in which the "disloyal" statement of a friend might be expressed. (p. 172)

Some researchers, especially in anthropological interviews, tend to rely on interpreters and so become vulnerable to added layers of meanings, biases, and interpretations, and this may lead to disastrous misunderstandings (Freeman, 1983). At times, specific jargon, such as the medical metalanguage of physicians, may be a code that is hard for nonmembers to understand.

Deciding How to Present Oneself. Do we present ourselves as representatives from academia studying medical students (Becker, 1956)? Do we approach the interview as a woman-to-woman discussion (Spradley, 1979)? Do we "dress down" to look like the respondents (Fontana, 1977; Thompson, 1975)? Do we represent the colonial culture (Malinowski, 1922), or do we humbly present ourselves as "learners" (Wax, 1960)? This is very important because once the interviewer's presentational self is "cast," it leaves a profound impression on the respondents and has a great influence of the success of the study (or lack thereof). Sometimes inadvertently, the researcher's presentational self may be misrepresented, as Johnson (1976) discovered in studying a welfare office when some of the employees assumed that he was a "spy" for management despite his best efforts to present himself to the contrary.

Locating an Informant. The researcher must find an insider—a member of the group being studied—who is willing to be an informant and act as a guide and translator of cultural mores and, at times, of jargon or language. Although the researcher can conduct interviews without an informant, he or she can save much time and avoid mistakes if a good informant becomes available. The "classic" sociological informant was Doc in Whyte's (1943) *Street Corner Society*. Without Doc's help and guidance, it is doubtful that Whyte would have been able to access his respondents to the level he did. Rabinow's (1977) discussion of his relation with his main informant, Abd al-Malik ben Lahcen, was very instructive. Malik acted as a translator but also provided Rabinow with access to the cultural ways of the

respondents, and by his actions he provided Rabinow with insights into the vast differences between a University of Chicago researcher and a native Moroccan.

Gaining Trust. Survey researchers asking respondents whether they would or would not favor the establishment of a nuclear dump in their state (Frey, 1993) do not have too much work to do in the way of gaining trust; respondents have opinions about nuclear dumps and are very willing to express them, sometimes forcefully. But it is clearly a different story if one wants to ask about people's frequency of sexual intercourse or preferred method of birth control. The interviewer needs to establish some trust with the respondents (Cicourel, 1974). Rasmussen (1989) had to spend months as a "wallflower" in the waiting room of a massage parlor before any of the masseuses gained enough trust in him to divulge to him, in unstructured interviews, the nature of their "massage" relation with clients. Gaining trust is essential to the success of the interviews, and once it is gained, trust can still be very fragile. Any faux pas by the researcher may destroy days, weeks, or months of painfully gained trust.

Establishing Rapport. Because the goal of unstructured interviewing is *understanding*, it is paramount to establish rapport with respondents; that is, the researcher must be able to take the role of the respondents and attempt to see the situation from their viewpoint rather than superimpose his or her world of academia and preconceptions on them. Although a close rapport with the respondents opens the doors to more informed research, it may create problems in that the researcher may become a spokesperson for the group studied, losing his or her distance and objectivity, or may "go native" and become a member of the group and forgo his or her academic role. At times, what the researcher might feel is a good rapport turns out to not to be, as Thompson (1985) found out in a nightmarish way when he was subjected to a brutal beating by the Hell's Angels just as his study of them was coming to a close. At the other end of the spectrum, some researchers might never feel that

they have established a good rapport with their respondents. Malinowski (1967/1989), for example, always mistrusted the motives of the natives and at times was troubled by their brutish sensuality or angered by their outright lying or deceptions: "After lunch I [carried] yellow calico and spoke about the *baloma*. I made a small *sagali*, Navavile. I was *fed up* with the *niggers*" (p. 154).

Collecting Empirical Material. Being out in the field does not afford one the luxury of video cameras, soundproof rooms, and high-quality recording equipment. Lofland (1971) provided detailed information on doing and writing up interviews and on the types of field notes that one ought to take and how to organize them. Yet field-workers often must make do with what they can have in the field; the "tales" of their methods used range from holding a miniature tape recorder as inconspicuously as possible to taking mental notes and then rushing to the privacy of a bathroom to jot down notes—at times on toilet paper. We agree with Lofland that, regardless of the circumstances, researchers ought to (a) take notes regularly and promptly, (b) write down everything no matter how unimportant it might seem at the time, (c) try to be as inconspicuous as possible in note taking, and (d) analyze notes frequently.

Other Types of Unstructured Interviewing

We consider the issue of interpreting and reporting empirical material later in the chapter. In this subsection, we briefly outline some different types of unstructured interviews.

Oral History

The oral history differs from other unstructured interviews in purpose but not methodologically. The oral collection of historical materials goes back to ancient times, but its modern-day formal organization can be traced to 1948 when Allan Nevins began the Oral History Project at Columbia University (Starr, 1984, p. 4). The oral history captures a variety of forms of life, from common folks talking about their jobs in Terkel's

(1975) *Working* to the historical recollections of President Harry Truman in Miller's (1974) *Plain Speaking* (see also Starr, 1984, p. 4). Often oral history transcripts are not published, but many may be found in libraries. They are like silent memoirs waiting for someone to rummage through them and bring their testimony to life. Recently, oral history has found great popularity in the feminist movement (Gluck & Patai, 1991), where it is seen as a way of understanding and bringing forth the history of women in a culture that has traditionally relied on masculine interpretation: "Refusing to be rendered historically voiceless any longer, women are creating a new history—using our own voices and experiences" (Gluck, 1984, p. 222).

Relevant to the study of oral history (and, in fact, to all interviewing) is the study of memory and its relation to recall. For instance, Schwartz (1999) examined the ages at which we recall critical episodes in our lives, concluding that "biographical memory . . . is better understood as a social process" and that "as we look back, we find ourselves remembering our lives in terms of our experience with others" (p. 15; see also Schwartz, 1996). Ellis (1991) resorted to the use of "sociological introspection" to reconstruct biographical episodes of her past life. Notable among Ellis's work in this genre was her reconstruction of her 9-year relationship with her partner, Gene Weinstein. Ellis (1995) described the emotional negotiations the two of them went through as they coped with his downward-spiraling health until the final negotiation with death.

Creative Interviewing

Close to oral history, but used more conventionally as a sociological tool, is Douglas's (1985) "creative interviewing." Douglas argued against the "how to" guides to conducting interviews because unstructured interviews take place in the largely situational everyday world of members of society. Thus, interviewers must necessarily be creative, must forget "how to" rules, and must adapt to the ever-changing situations they face. Similar to oral historians, Douglas described

interviewing as collecting oral reports from the members of society. In creative interviewing, these reports go well beyond the length of conventional unstructured interviews and may become "life histories," with interviewing taking place in multiple sessions over many days with the respondents.

■ POSTMODERN INTERVIEWING

Douglas's (1985) concern with the important role played by the interviewer as human, a concern that is also shared by the feminist oral historians, became a paramount element in the interviewing approaches of postmodern anthropologists and sociologists during the mid-1980s. Marcus and Fischer (1986) addressed ethnography at large, but their discussion was germane to unstructured interviewing because, as we have seen, such interviewing constitutes the major way of collecting data in fieldwork. Marcus and Fischer voiced reflexive concerns about the ways in which the researcher influences the study, both in the methods of data collection and in the techniques of reporting findings. This concern led to new ways of conducting interviews in the hope of minimizing, if not eliminating, the interviewer's influence. One such way is through *polyphonic* interviewing, where the voices of the respondents are recorded with minimal influence from the researcher and are not collapsed together and reported as one through the interpretation of the researcher. Instead, the multiple perspectives of the various respondents are reported, and differences and problems encountered are discussed, rather than glossed over (Krieger, 1983). *Interpretive interactionism* follows in the footsteps of creative and polyphonic interviewing, but borrowing from James Joyce, it adds a new element—that of epiphanies, which Denzin (1989a) described as "those interactional moments that leave marks on people's lives [and] have the potential for creating transformational experiences for the person" (p. 15). Thus, the topic of inquiry becomes dramatized by the focus on existential moments in people's lives, possibly

producing richer and more meaningful data. Finally, as postmodernists seek new ways of understanding and reporting data, we note the concept of "oralism," which refers to "the ways in which oral forms, derived from everyday life, are, with the recording powers of video, applied to the analytical tasks associated with literate forms" (Ulmer, 1989, p. xi). In oralism, the traditional product of interviewing, talk, is coupled with the visual, providing a product consonant with a society that is dominated by the medium of television (Ulmer, 1989).

■ GENDERED INTERVIEWING

The housewife goes into a well-stocked store to look for a frying pan. Her thinking probably does not proceed exactly this way, but it is helpful to think of the many possible two-way choices she might make: Cast iron or aluminum? Thick or thin? Metal or wooden handle? Covered or not? Deep or shallow? Large or small? This brand or that? Reasonable or too high in price? To buy or not? Cash or charge? Have it delivered or carry it? . . . The two-way question is simplicity itself when it comes to recording answers and tabulating them. (Payne, 1951, pp. 55–56)

The preceding quote represents the prevalent paternalistic attitude toward women in interviewing (Oakley, 1981, p. 39) as well as the paradigmatic concern with coding answers and, therefore, with presenting limited dichotomous choices. Apart from a tendency to be condescending to women, the traditional interview paradigm does not account for gendered differences. In fact, Babbie's (1992) classic text, *The Practice of Social Research*, briefly referenced gender only three times and did not even mention the influence of gender on interviews. As Oakley (1981) cogently pointed out, both the interviewer and the respondent are considered to be faceless and invisible, and they must be if the paradigmatic assumption of gathering value-free data is to be maintained. Yet, as Denzin (1989a) told us, "gender filters knowledge" (p. 116); that is, the sex of the interviewer and the sex of the respondent make

a difference because the interview takes place within the cultural boundaries of a paternalistic social system in which masculine identities are differentiated from feminine ones.

In the typical interview, there exists a hierarchical relation, with the respondent being in the subordinate position. The interviewer is instructed to be courteous, friendly, and pleasant:

The interviewer's manner should be friendly, courteous, conversational, and unbiased. He should be neither too grim nor too effusive; neither too talkative nor too timid. The idea should be to put the respondent at ease, *so that he will talk freely and fully*. (Selltiz, Jahoda, Deutsch, & Cook, 1965, p. 576, emphasis added)

Yet, as the last line of this quote shows, this demeanor is a ruse to gain the trust and confidence of the respondent without reciprocating those feelings in any way. The interviewer is not to give his or her own opinions and is to evade direct questions. What seems to be a conversation is really a one-way pseudoconversation, raising an ethical dilemma (Fine, 1983–1984) inherent in the study of people for opportunistic reasons. When the respondent is female, the interview presents added problems because the preestablished format directed at information relevant for the study tends both to ignore the respondent's own concerns and to curtail any attempts to digress and elaborate. This format also stymies any revelation of personal feelings and emotions.

Warren (1988) discussed problems of gender in both anthropological and sociological fieldwork, and many of these problems are also found in the ethnographic interview. Some of these problems are the traditional ones of entrée and trust that may be heightened by the sex of the interviewer, especially in highly sex-segregated societies:

I never witnessed any ceremonies that were barred to women. Whenever I visited compounds, I sat with the women while the men gathered in the parlors or in front of the compound. . . . I never entered any of the places where men sat around to drink beer or palm wine and to chat. (Sudarkasa, 1986, quoted in Warren, 1988, p. 16)

Solutions to the problem have been to view the female anthropologist as androgyny or to grant her honorary male status for the duration of her research. Warren (1988) also pointed to some advantages of the researcher being female and, therefore, being seen as harmless or invisible. Other problems are associated with the researcher's status and race and with the context of the interview, and again these problems are magnified for female researchers in a paternalistic world. Female interviewers at times face the added burden of sexual overtures or covert sexual hassles (p. 33).

Feminist researchers are suggesting ways in which to circumvent the traditional interviewing paradigm. Oakley (1981) noted that interviewing is a masculine paradigm that is embedded in a masculine culture and stresses masculine traits while at the same time excluding traits, such as sensitivity and emotionality, that are culturally viewed as feminine traits. However, there is a growing reluctance, especially among female researchers (Oakley, 1981; Reinharz, 1992; Smith, 1987), to continue interviewing women as "objects" with little or no regard for them as individuals. Although this reluctance stems from moral and ethical reasons, it is also relevant methodologically. As Oakley (1981) pointed out, in interviewing there is "no intimacy without reciprocity" (p. 49). Thus, the emphasis is shifting to allow the development of a closer relation between the interviewer and the respondent. Researchers are attempting to minimize status differences and are doing away with the traditional hierarchical situation in interviewing. Interviewers can show their human side and can answer questions and express feelings. Methodologically, this new approach provides a greater spectrum of responses and a greater insight into the lives of the respondents—or "participants," to avoid the hierarchical pitfall (Reinharz, 1992, p. 22)—because it encourages them to control the sequencing and language of the interview while also allowing them the freedom of open-ended responses (Oakley, 1981; Reinharz, 1992; Smith, 1987). To wit, "Women were always . . . encouraged to 'digress' into details of their personal histories and to recount anecdotes of

their working lives. Much important information was gathered in this way" (Yeandle, 1984, quoted in Reinharz, 1992, p. 25).

Hertz (1997a) made the self of the researcher visible and suggested that it is only one of many selves that the researcher takes to the field. She asserted that interviewers need to be reflexive; that is, they need to "have an ongoing conversation about experience while simultaneously living in the moment" (p. viii). By doing so, they will heighten the understanding of differences of ideologies, culture, and politics between interviewers and interviewees.

Hertz also underscored the importance of "voices"—how we (as authors) express and write our stories, which data we include and which data we exclude, whose voices we choose to represent and whose voices we choose not to represent. The concern with voices is also found, very powerfully, in Vaz's (1997) edited *Oral Narrative Research With Black Women*. One of the contributors, Obbo (1997), stated,

This chapter is a modest exercise in giving expression to women's voices and in rescuing their perceptions and experiences from being mere murmurs or backdrop to political, social, and cultural happenings. Women's voices have been devalued by male chronicles of cultural history even when the men acknowledge female informants; they are overshadowed by the voice of male authority and ascendance in society. (pp. 42–43)

This commitment to maintaining the integrity of the phenomena and preserving the viewpoint of the respondents, as expressed in their everyday language, is very akin to phenomenological and existential sociologies (Douglas & Johnson, 1977; Kotarba & Fontana, 1984) and also reflects the concern of postmodern ethnographers (Marcus & Fischer, 1986). The differences are (a) the heightened moral concern for respondents/participants, (b) the attempt to redress the male/female hierarchy and existing paternalistic power structure, and (c) the paramount importance placed on membership because the effectiveness of male researchers in interviewing female respondents has been largely discredited.

Behar (1996) addressed the ambiguous nature of the enterprise of interviewing by asking the following questions. Where do we locate the researcher in the field? How much do we reveal about ourselves? How do we reconcile our different roles and positions? Behar made us see that interviewer, writer, respondent, and interview are not clearly distinct entities; rather, they are intertwined in a deeply problematic way. Behar and Gordon (1995) also cogently pointed out that the seminal work by Marcus and Fischer (1986) broke ground with modernistic ethnography but remains an example of paternalistic sociology because it did not address women's concerns.

Some feminist sociologists have gone beyond the concern with interviewing or fieldwork in itself. Richardson (1992a) strove for new forms of expression to report the findings and presented some of her fieldwork in the form of poetry. Clough (1998) questioned the whole enterprise of fieldwork under the current paradigm and called for a reassessment of the whole sociological enterprise and for a rereading of existing sociological texts in a light that is not marred by a paternalistic bias. Their voices echoed the concern of Smith (1987), who eloquently stated,

The problem (of a research project) and its particular solution are analogous to those by which fresco painters solved the problems of representing the different temporal moments of a story in the singular space of the wall. The problem is to produce in a two-dimensional space framed as a wall a world of action and movement in time. (p. 281)

A growing number of researchers believe that we cannot isolate gender from other important elements that also "filter knowledge." For example, Collins (1990) wrote eloquently about the filtering of knowledge through memberships—of being black and female in American culture, in her case. Weston (1998) made just as powerful a case for sexuality, contending that it should not be treated as a compartmentalized subspecialty because it underlies and is integral to the whole of social sciences. It is clear that gender, sexuality, and race cannot be considered in isolation; race, class, hierarchy, status, and age (Seidman, 1991) all are

part of the complex, yet often ignored, elements that shape interviewing.

■ FRAMING AND INTERPRETING INTERVIEWS

Aside from the problem of framing real-life events in a two-dimensional space, we face the added problems of how the framing is being done and who is doing the framing. In sociological terms, this means that the type of interviewing selected, the techniques used, and the ways of recording information all come to bear on the results of the study. In addition, data must be interpreted, and the researcher has a great deal of influence over what part of the data will be reported and how the data will be reported.

Framing Interviews

Numerous volumes have been published on the techniques of structured interviewing (see, e.g., Babbie, 1992; Bradburn et al., 1979; Gordon, 1980; Kahn & Cannell, 1957). There is also a voluminous literature on group interviewing, especially on marketing, and survey research (for a comprehensive review of literature in this area, see Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). The uses of group interviewing have also been linked to qualitative sociology (Morgan, 1988). Unstructured interviewing techniques also have been covered thoroughly (Denzin, 1989; Lofland, 1971; Lofland & Lofland, 1984; Spradley, 1979).

As we have noted, unstructured interviews vary widely given their informal nature and depending on the type of the setting, and some eschew the use of any preestablished set of techniques (Douglas, 1985). Yet there are techniques involved in interviewing whether the interviewer is just being "a nice person" or he or she is following a format. Techniques can be varied to meet various situations, and varying one's techniques is known as using tactics. Traditionally, the researcher is involved in an informal conversation with the respondent; thus, the researcher must maintain a tone of "friendly" chat while

trying to remain close to the guidelines of the topics of inquiry that he or she has in mind. The researcher begins by "breaking the ice" with general questions and gradually moves on to more specific ones while also—as inconspicuously as possible—asking questions intended to check the veracity of the respondent's statements. The researcher should avoid getting involved in a "real" conversation in which he or she answers questions asked by the respondent or provides personal opinions on the matters discussed. The researcher can avoid "getting trapped" by shrugging off the relevance of his or her opinions (e.g., "It doesn't matter how I feel; it's your opinion that's important") or by feigning ignorance (e.g., "I really don't know enough about this to say anything; you're the expert"). Of course, as we have seen in the case of gendered interviewing, the researcher may reject these techniques and "come down" to the level of the respondent to engage in a "real" conversation with give and take and shared empathetic understanding.

The use of language, particularly that of specific terms, is important to create a "sharedness of meanings" in which both interviewer and the respondent understand the contextual nature of specific referents. For instance, in studying nude beaches, Douglas and Rasmussen (1977) discovered that the term "nude beach virgin" had nothing to do with chastity; rather, it referred to the fact that a person's buttocks were white, indicating to others that he or she was a newcomer to the nude beach. Language is also important in delineating the type of question (e.g., broad, narrow, leading, instructive).

Nonverbal techniques are also important in interviewing. There are four basic modes of nonverbal communication:

Proxemic communication is the use of interpersonal space to communicate attitudes, *chronemic* communication is the use of pacing of speech and length of silence in conversation, *kinesic* communication includes any body movements or postures, and *paralinguistic* communication includes all the variations in volume, pitch, and quality of voice. (Gorden, 1980, p. 335)

All four of these modes represent important techniques for the researcher. In addition, the researcher should carefully note and record respondents' use of these modes because interview data are more than verbal records and should include, as much as possible, nonverbal features of the interaction. Finally, techniques vary with the group being interviewed; for instance, interviewing a group of children requires a different approach from the one that the interviewer may use when interviewing a group of elderly widows (Lopata, 1980).

An interesting proposal for framing interviews came from Saukko (2000), who asked, "How can we be true and respect the inner experiences of people and at the same time critically assess the cultural discourses that form the very stuff from which our experiences are made?" (p. 299). Using the metaphor of patchwork quilts (which have no center), Saukko patched and stitched together the stories of five anorexic women. Thus, she rejected the idea of framing characters as monological and instead, borrowing from Bakhtin (1986), presented them as "dialogic characters" (Saukko, 2000, p. 303).

Interpreting Interviews

Many studies that use unstructured interviews are not reflexive enough about the interpreting process. Common platitudes proclaim that data speak for themselves and that the researcher is neutral, unbiased, and "invisible." The data reported tend to flow nicely, there are no contradictory data, and there is no mention of what data were excluded and why. Improprieties never happen, and the main concern seems to be the proper (if unreflexive) filing, analyzing, and reporting of events. But anyone who has engaged in fieldwork knows better. No matter how organized the researcher may be, he or she slowly becomes buried under an increasing mountain of field notes, transcripts, newspaper clippings, and audiotapes. Traditionally, readers were presented with the researcher's interpretation of the data, cleaned and streamlined and collapsed in a rational non-contradictory account. More recently, sociologists

have come to grips with the reflexive, problematic, and sometimes contradictory nature of data and with the tremendous, if unspoken, influence of the researcher as author. What Van Maanen (1988) called “confessional style” began in earnest during the 1970s (Johnson, 1976) and has continued unabated to our days in a soul cleansing by researchers of problematic feelings and sticky situations in the field. Although perhaps somewhat overdone at times, these “confessions” are very valuable because they make readers aware of the complex and cumbersome nature of interviewing people in their natural settings and lend a tone of realism and veracity to studies. Malinowski (1967/1989) provided a good example: “Yesterday I slept very late. Got up around 10. The day before I had engaged Omaga, Koupa, and a few others. They didn’t come. Again I fell into a rage” (p. 67).

Showing the human side of the researcher and the problematics of unstructured interviewing has taken new forms in deconstructionism (Derrida, 1976). Here, the influence of the author is brought under scrutiny. Thus, the text created by the rendition of events by the researcher is “deconstructed”; the author’s biases and taken-for-granted notions are exposed, and sometimes alternative ways of looking at the data are introduced (Clough, 1998).

Postmodern social researchers, as we have seen, attempt to expose the role of the researcher as field-worker and minimize his role as author. For instance, Crapanzano (1980) reported Tuhami’s accounts, whether they were sociohistorical renditions, dreams, or outright lies, because they all constituted a part of this Moroccan Arab respondent’s sense of self and personal history. In interviewing Tuhami, Crapanzano learned not only about his respondent but also about himself:

As Tuhami’s interlocutor, I became an active participant in his life history, even though I rarely appear directly in his recitations. Not only did my presence, and my questions, prepare him for the text he was to produce, but they produced what I read as a change of consciousness in him. They produced a change of consciousness in me too. We were both jostled from our assumptions about the nature of the everyday world and ourselves and groped for common reference points within this limbo of interchange. (p. 11)

No longer pretending to be a faceless respondent and an invisible researcher, Tuhami and Crapanzano were portrayed as individual humans with their own personal histories and idiosyncrasies, and the readers learn about two people and two cultures.

Gubrium and Holstein (2002) actually considered the interview as a contextually based, mutually accomplished story that is reached through collaboration between the researcher and the respondent. Thus, just to tell what happened (the *what*) is not enough because the *what* depends greatly on the ways, negotiations, and other interactive elements that take place between the researcher and the respondent (the *how*). Others have addressed the same concerns, at times enlarging the one-to-one interaction to interaction between the researcher and a whole community or outlining the various types of collaborative interviewing (Ellis & Berger, 2002).

The discovery of reflexivity proved to be an epiphanic moment for Banister (1999). Once she was able to realize that her study of midlife women resonated strong personal notes with her midlife experience, Banister acknowledged that she was not just a witness to her respondents and came to see the liminality of her position. Thus, she was able to understand the women’s midlife experience as well as her own and to reach a deep ethnographic understanding.

Another powerful way in which to accentuate reflexivity in interviewing is through narrative, where in trying to understand the “other” we learn about (our) “selves,” reaching the hermeneutic circle, that is, the circle of understanding (Rabinow & Sullivan, 1987; Warren, 2002). Denzin (2003b) noted that writers can gain knowledge about themselves by bringing forth their autobiographical past; in a way, they are bringing the past into the present (Pinar, 1994). Denzin (2003a) proposed that this perhaps can best be achieved through the use of performances rather than traditional writing modes as a way in which to reach across the divide and extend a hand to those who have been oppressed. In performance, we infuse powerful feelings and try to recreate a way in which to understand those we study and ourselves

in our relationship to them, that is, not merely to create new sociological knowledge but also to use that hand to grasp and pull the downtrodden out of the mire in which they are suffocating.

■ ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Because the objects of inquiry in interviewing are humans, extreme care must be taken to avoid any harm to them. Traditionally, ethical concerns have revolved around the topics of *informed consent* (receiving consent by the respondent after having carefully and truthfully informed him or her about the research), *right to privacy* (protecting the identity of the respondent), and *protection from harm* (physical, emotional, or any other kind).

No sociologists or other social scientists would dismiss these three ethical concerns, yet there are other ethical concerns that are less unanimously upheld. The controversy over overt/covert fieldwork is more germane to participant observation but could include the surreptitious use of tape-recording devices. Warwick (1973) and Douglas (1985) argued for the use of covert methods because they mirror the deceitfulness of everyday-life reality, whereas others, including Erickson (1967), vehemently opposed the study of uninformed respondents.

Another problematic issue stems from the researcher's degree of involvement with the group under study. Whyte (1943) was asked to vote more than once during the same local elections (i.e., to vote illegally) by the members of the group to which he had gained access and befriended, thereby gaining the group members' trust. He used "situational ethics," that is, judging the legal infraction to be minor in comparison with the loss of his fieldwork if he refused to vote more than once. Thompson (1985) was faced with a more serious possible legal breach. He was terrified at the prospect of having to witness one of the alleged rapes for which the Hell's Angels had become notorious, but as he reported, none took place during his research. The most famous, and widely discussed, case of questionable ethics in qualitative sociology took place

during Humphreys's (1970) research for *Tearoom Trade*. Humphreys studied homosexual encounters in public restrooms in parks ("tearooms") by acting as a lookout ("watch queen"). Although this fact, in itself may be seen as unethical, it is the following one that raised many academic eyebrows. Humphreys, unable to interview the men in the tearoom, recorded their cars' license plate numbers, which led him to find their residences with the help of police files. He then interviewed many of the men in their homes without being recognized as having been their watch queen.

A twist in the degree of involvement with respondents came from a controversial article by Goode (2002) in which he summarily dismissed years of research with the fat civil rights organization as a "colossal waste of time." Goode discussed the problematics of sexual intimacy between researchers and respondents and acknowledged that he had casual sexual liaisons with some of the respondents. In fact, he fathered a child with a person he had met at research meetings. Goode's article was published along with a number of responses, all of them very critical (in different ways) of Goode's cavalier approach (Bell, 2002; Manning, 2002; Sagui, 2002; Williams, 2002). Perhaps the following quote from Williams (2002) best summarized the feelings of the scholars responding to Goode: "I would hope and expect that sociologists and their audiences could understand public discrimination without sleeping with its victims" (p. 560).

Another ethical problem is raised by the veracity of the reports made by researchers. For example, Whyte's (1943) famous study of Italian street corner men in Boston has come under severe scrutiny (Boelen, 1992) as some have alleged that Whyte portrayed the men in demeaning ways that did not reflect their visions of themselves. Whyte's case is still unresolved; it illustrates the delicate issue of ethical decisions in the field and in reporting field notes, even more than 50 years later (Richardson, 1992b).

A growing number of scholars, as we have seen (Oakley, 1981), feel that most of traditional in-depth interviewing is unethical, whether wittingly or unwittingly. The techniques and tactics

of interviewing, they say, are really ways of manipulating the respondents while treating them as objects or numbers rather than as individual humans. Should the quest for objectivity supersede the human side of those we study? Consider the following:

One day while doing research at the convalescent center, I was talking to one of the aides while she was beginning to change the bedding of one of the patients who had urinated and soaked the bed. He was the old, blind, ex-wrestler confined in the emergency room. Suddenly, the wrestler decided he was not going to cooperate with the aide and began striking violently at the air about him, fortunately missing the aide. Since nobody else was around, I had no choice but to hold the patient pinned down to the bed while the aide proceeded to change the bedding. It was not pleasant: The patient was squirming and yelling horrible threats at the top of his voice; the acid smell of urine was nauseating; I was slowly losing my grip on the much stronger patient, while all along feeling horribly like Chief Bromden when he suffocates the lobotomized MacMurphy in Ken Kesey's novel. *But there was no choice; one just could not sit back and take notes while the patient tore apart the aide.* (Fontana, 1977, p. 187, emphasis added)

A chapter (Edwards & Mauthner, 2002) in a recent edited volume (Mauthner, Birch, Jessop, & Miller, 2002) presented new insight on the ethics of feminist research. Edwards and Mauthner (2002) outlined the various models of ethics currently existing: the universalist models based on "universal principles such as honesty, justice, and respect" or based on "goodness of outcomes of research" (p. 20). In contrast, a third model is based on "contextual or situational ethical position" (p. 20). The authors noted that a majority of feminist researchers (if not all of them) have focused on care and responsibility, that is, on contextually based "feminist-informed social values" (p. 21). The authors lauded the work of Denzin (1997) for applying these feminist principles to social research. However, they found that some of Denzin's ideas could be refined to some degree. For instance, Denzin (1997) advocated a symmetrical relation between researchers and respondents,

whereas others (e.g., Young, 1997) criticized this as "neither possible nor desirable" (Edwards & Mauthner, 2002, p. 26) and called instead for "asymmetrical reciprocity." In the words of the Edwards and Mauthner (2002), "Rather than ignoring or blurring power positions, ethical practice needs to pay attention to them" (p. 27).

Clearly, as we move forward with sociology, we cannot—to paraphrase what Blumer said so many years ago—let the methods dictate our images of humans. As Punch (1986) suggested, as field-workers we need to exercise common sense and responsibility—and, we would like to add, to our respondents first, to the study next, and to ourselves last. As Johnson (2002) empathically proclaimed, regardless of what criteria we wish to adopt for interviewing, "the most important ethical imperative is to tell the truth" (p. 116).

■ NEW TRENDS IN INTERVIEWING

The latest trends in interviewing have come some distance from structured questions; we have reached the point of the interview as negotiated text. Ethnographers have realized for quite some time that researchers are not invisible neutral entities; rather, they are part of the interaction they seek to study, and they influence that interaction. At last, interviewing is being brought in line with ethnography. There is a growing realization that interviewers are not the mythical neutral tools envisioned by survey research. Interviewers are increasingly seen as active participants in an interaction with respondents, and interviews are seen as negotiated accomplishments of both interviewers and respondents that are shaped by the contexts and situations in which they take place. As Schwandt (1997) noted, "It has become increasingly common in qualitative studies to view the interview as a form of discourse between two or more speakers or as a linguistic event in which the meanings of questions and responses are contextually grounded and jointly constructed by interviewer and respondent" (p. 79). We are beginning to realize that we cannot lift the results of interviews out of the contexts in which they

were gathered and claim them as objective data with no strings attached.

The Interview as a Negotiated Accomplishment

Let us briefly recap the two traditional approaches to the interview, following Holstein and Gubrium (1995, 1997). The authors use Converse and Schuman's (1974) *Conversations at Random* as an exemplar of the interview as used in survey research. In this context, the interviewer is carefully instructed to remain as passive as possible so as to reduce his or her influence; the scope of the interviewer's function is to access the respondent's answers. This is a *rational* type of interviewing; it assumes that there is an objective knowledge out there and if that one can access it if he or she is skilled enough, just as a skilled surgeon can remove a kidney from a donor and use it in a different context (e.g., for a patient awaiting a transplant).

Holstein and Gubrium (1995, 1997) regarded Douglas's (1985) creative interviewing as a romanticist type of interviewing. Douglas's interviewing is based on *feelings*; it assumes that researchers, as interviewers, need to "get to know" the respondents beneath their rational facades and that researchers can reach respondents' deep well of emotions by engaging them and by sharing feelings and thoughts with them. Douglas's interviewer is certainly more active and far less neutral than Converse and Schuman's interviewer, but the assumptions are still the same—that the *skills* of the interviewer will provide access to knowledge and that there is a *core knowledge* that the researcher can access.

Holstein and Gubrium (1995) finally considered the new type of interviewing, although "new" isn't exactly accurate given that their reference for this is the work of Ithiel de Sola Pool, published in 1957. To wit, "Every interview is . . . an interpersonal drama with a developing plot" (Pool, 1957, p. 193, quoted in Holstein & Gubrium 1995, p. 14). Holstein and Gubrium went on to discuss that so far we have focused on the *whats* of the interview (the substantive findings)

and that it is now time to pay attention to the *hows* of the interview (the context, particular situation, nuances, manners, people involved, etc., in which interview interactions take place). This concept harks back to ethnomethodology, according to Holstein and Gubrium: "To say that the interview is an interpersonal drama with a developing plot is part of a broader claim that reality is an ongoing, interpretive accomplishment" (p. 16). Garfinkel, Sacks, and others clearly stated during the late 1960s that reality is an ever-changing, ongoing accomplishment based on the practical reasoning of the members of society. It is time to consider the interview as a practical production, the meaning of which is accomplished at the intersection of the interaction of the interviewer and the respondent.

In a later essay, Gubrium and Holstein (1998) continued their argument by looking at interviews as storytelling, which they saw as a practical production used by members of society to accomplish coherence in their accounts. Once more, they encouraged us to examine the *hows* as well as the *whats* of storytelling. Similarly, Sarup (1996) told us,

Each narrative has two parts, a story (*histoire*) and a discourse (*discourse*). The story is the content, or chain of events. The story is the "what" in a narrative, the discourse is the "how." The discourse is rather like a plot, how the reader becomes aware of what happened, [and] the order of appearance of the events. (p. 17)

Gubrium and Holstein are not alone in advocating this reflexive approach to interviews. Both Silverman (1993) and Dingwall (1997) credited Cicourel's (1964) classic work, *Method and Measurement in Sociology*, with pointing to the interview as a social encounter. Dingwall (1997) noted,

If the interview is a social encounter, then, logically, it must be analysed in the same way as any other social encounter. The products of an interview are the outcome of a socially situated activity where the responses are passed through the role-playing and impression management of both the interviewer and the respondent. (p. 56)

Seidman (1991) discussed interviewing as a relationship by relying on a principal intellectual antecedent of the ethnomethodologist Alfred Schutz. Seidman analyzed the interviewer–respondent relation in terms of Schutz’s (1967) “I–Thou” relation, where the two share a reciprocity of perspective and, by both being “thou” oriented, create a “we” relationship. Thus, the respondent is no longer “an object or a type” (Seidman, 1991, p. 73); rather, the respondent becomes an equal participant in the interaction.

To recapitulate, we must find someone willing to talk to us (Arksey & Knight, 2002). Then we go through many creative stratagems to find more respondents (Warren, 2002; Weiss, 1994). Then, we talk to the respondents and attend to the meaning of the stories they weave while interjecting our own perspectives. Warren (2002) puts it beautifully: “In the social interaction of the qualitative interview, the perspectives of the interviewer and the respondent dance together for the moment but also extend outward in social space and backward and forward in time” (p. 98). Finally, we try to piece together the kaleidoscope of shapes and colors into a coherent story—something that has some meaning and, in the common understanding that we achieve, brings us all closer together (Atkinson, 2002).

The Problematics of New Approaches

Some of the proponents of the ethnomethodologically informed interview are critical of both interactionist and positivist interview methods. Dingwall (1997), as well as others, spoke of the romantic movement in ethnography (and interviewing)—the idea that the nearer we come to the respondent, the closer we are to apprehending the “real self.” This assumption neglects the fact that the self is a process that is ever negotiated and accomplished in the interaction. Dingwall also faulted the “postmodern” turn; that is, if there is no real self, then there is no real world and so we can create one of our own. Finally, Dingwall was troubled by the “crusading” nature of the romantics and asked, “What is the value of a scholarly enterprise that

is more concerned with being ‘right on’ than with being right?” (p. 64).

In a similar vein, Atkinson and Silverman (1997) rejected the postmodern notion of “polyphonic voices,” correctly noting that the interviewer and the respondent collaborate together to create an essentially monologic view of reality. This same rejection could be made by using Schutz’s (1967) argument, that is, “I” and “thou” create a unified “we” rather than two separate versions of it.

Ethnomethodologically informed interviewing is not, however, immune from criticism itself. Schutz (1967) assumed a reciprocity of perspective that might not exist. Granted, in our interview society, we all know the commonsense routines and ground rules of interviewing, but in other societies this might not be the case. Bowler (1997) attempted to interview Pakistani women about their experience with maternity services and found a total lack of understanding of the value of social research and interviewing:

I had told them that I was writing a book on my findings. Yams, who spoke the better English, translated this with a look of disbelief on her face, and then they both dissolved into laughter. The hospitals were very good. There weren’t any problems. All was well. (p. 72)

Bowler was forced to conclude that interviewing might not work when there is no “shared notion of the process of research” (p. 66).

Silverman (1993) envisioned a different problem. He seemed to feel that some ethnomethodologists have suspended their interest in substantive concerns of everyday life, claiming that they cannot address them until they knew more about the ways in which these realities are accomplished. He noted, “Put simply, according to one reading of Cicourel, we would focus on the conversational skills of the participants rather than on the content of what they are saying and its relation to the world outside the interview” (p. 98).

Cicourel (1970) stated that sociologists need to outline a workable model of the actor before engaging in the study of self and society. Garfinkel held similar beliefs. For instance, in his famous

study of a transsexual named Agnes, Garfinkel (1967) examined the routines by which societal members pass as males or females; he had little or no interest in issues of transsexuality per se. Thus, it would follow that, according to Silverman's reading of ethnomethodology, we should learn the conversational methods before attempting to learn substantive matters in interviewing.

■ FUTURE DIRECTIONS

To borrow from Gubrium and Holstein (1997), "Where do we go from here?" (p. 97). We share with these two authors a concern with appreciating the new horizons of postmodernism while simultaneously remaining conservatively committed to the empirical description of everyday life. Gubrium and Holstein (1998) introduced a technique called "analytic bracketing" to deal with the multiple levels of interviewing (and ethnography):

We may focus, for example on *how* a story is being told, while temporarily deferring our concern for the various *whats* that are involved—for example, the substance, structure, or plot of the story, the context within which it is told, or the audience to which it is accountable. We can later return to these issues. (p. 165)

The use of this analytic bracketing allows the authors to analyze interviewing in its coherence and diversity as an event that is collaboratively achieved and in which product and process are mutually constituted.

A pressing problem in interviewing concerns the kinds of standards that we should apply to these new and different types of interviews. To assume absolute relativism is not the solution because it would lead, in Silverman's (1997b) words, to the "sociology of navel-gazing" (p. 240). Silverman proposed an aesthetics for research, rejecting attempts to use literary forms in sociology: "If I want to read a good poem, why on earth should I turn to a social science journal?" (p. 240). Silverman's critique of interactionist sociology and proposal for aesthetic values seemed to focus on the following three points. First, he attacked the

grandiose political theorizing of British sociology and invoked a return to more modest, more minute goals. Second, he rejected the romanticist notion of equating experience (from the members' viewpoint) with authenticity. Third, he noted that in sociology we mimic the mass media of the interview society, thereby succumbing to the trivial, the kitschy, the gossipy, and the melodramatic and ignoring simplicity and profundity.

Silverman's (1997b) notions that we should pay attention to minute details in sociological studies, rather than embarking on grandiose abstract projects, in a way was not dissimilar to Lyotard's (1984) appeal for a return to local elements and away from metatheorizing. For Silverman, the "minute" details are the small details that go on in front of our eyes in our everyday life—very similar to Garfinkel's mundane routines that allow us to sustain the world and interact with each other.

We agree with Silverman that we need to stop deluding ourselves that in our particular method (whichever it may be), we have the key to the understanding of the self. We also agree that it is imperative that we look for new standards given that we are quickly digressing into a new form of the theater of the absurd (and without the literary flair, we fear). But we cannot wait to find a model of the methods used by participants in interviews or in everyday life before we proceed; Cicourel's (1970) invariant properties of interaction turned out to be so general as to be of little use to sociological inquiry.

We need to proceed by looking at the substantive concerns of the members of society while simultaneously examining the constructive activities used to produce order in everyday life and, all along, remaining reflexive about how interviews are accomplished (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997, 1998). For instance, as Baker (1997) pointed out, a researcher telling a respondent that "I am a mother of three" versus telling the respondent that "I am a university professor" accesses different categories and elicits different accounts. We need to move on with sociological inquiry, even though we realize that conditions are less than perfect. To paraphrase Robert Solow, as cited by

Geertz (1973), just because complete asepsis is impossible does not mean that we may just as well perform surgery in a sewer.

A different kind of future direction for interviewing stems largely from the new feminist interviewing practices. The traditional interview has painstakingly attempted to maintain neutrality and achieve objectivity and has kept the role of the interviewer as invisible as possible. Feminists instead are rebelling against the practice of *exploiting* respondents and wish to use interviewing for ameliorative purposes. To wit, "As researchers with a commitment to change, we must decenter ourselves from the 'ivory tower' and construct more participatory, democratic practices. *We must keep people and politics at the center of our research*" (Benmayor, 1991, pp. 172–173, emphasis added). Denzin (1997) referred to this approach as the "feminist, communitarian ethical model" (see also Lincoln, 1995) and told us,

The feminist, communitarian researcher does not invade the privacy of others, use informed consent forms, select subjects randomly, or measure research designs in term of their validity. This framework presumes a researcher who builds collaborative, reciprocal, trusting, and friendly relations with those studied. . . . It is also understood that those studied have claims of ownership over any materials that are produced in the research process, including field notes. (Denzin, 1997, p. 275)

Combining the roles of the scholar and the feminist may be problematic and sometimes may lead to conflict if the researcher has a different political orientation from that of the people studied (Wasserfall, 1993), but this approach may also be very rewarding in allowing the researcher to see positive results stemming from the research (Gluck, 1991).

A third kind of future direction, one that is already here but is likely to expand greatly in the near future, is that of performance and poetics. I combine the two because they stem from the same concerns for speaking with the voices of the respondents and taking a helping stance toward them. Also, they both possess an expressive trope that goes beyond the traditional

one of social sciences—prose. Denzin (2003a) championed performance to the exclusion of other modes of relating social science (ethnography and interview). Performance does not become fixed in a written text to be read later; rather, performance is doing, is now, and has feelings, passions, joy, tears, despair, and hope. Performance can reach to people's hearts and not only their minds. Performance can be a powerful instrument for social reform, for righting some wrongs, and for helping those in need. Performance relates to people in our media society; it draws interest, draws attention, and leads to questioning.

Poetics operates in a similar way by encapsulating in a welter of feelings and emotions a life story, an epiphanic moment in the life, a tragedy, a moment of sorrow, or a moment of utter joy. Consider the reply of Louisa May, a sort of average woman from Tennessee, when her partner asked her to terminate her pregnancy:

Jody May's father said,

"Get an Abortion."

I told him,

"I would never marry you.

I would never marry you.

I would never.

I am going to have this child.

I am going to.

I am. I am.

Richardson's (1997) masterful poem captured the soul of Louisa May, and through the poem we come to know that woman, we know her feelings, and our heart goes out to her.

Richardson (2002), in speaking about poetry pointed out that prose is privileged only because it is empowered by the current system, yet it is only one of many tropes of expression, including performance and poetry, in a newly fragmented world in which not only metatheories but also modes of expression have been fragmented, and we can now speak in many voices and in different tropes.

Electronic Interviewing

Another direction currently being taken in interviewing is related to the changing technologies available. The reliance on the interview as a means of information gathering most recently has expanded to electronic outlets, with questionnaires being administered by fax, electronic mail, and websites. Estimates suggest that nearly 50% of all households have computers and that nearly half of these use the Internet. Software that allows researchers to schedule and archive interview data gathered by chat room interviews is now available. The limited population of potential respondents with access to computers makes surveys of the general population infeasible, but electronic interviewing can reach 100% of some specialized populations (Schaefer & Dillman, 1998).

It is now possible to engage in "virtual interviewing," where Internet connections are used synchronously or asynchronously to obtain information. The advantages include low cost (no telephone or interviewer charges) and speed of return. Of course, face-to-face interaction is eliminated, as is the possibility of both the interviewer and the respondent reading nonverbal behavior or of cueing from gender, race, age, class, or other personal characteristics. Thus, establishing an interviewer-interviewee "relationship" and "living the moment" while gathering information (Hertz, 1997a) is difficult if not impossible. Internet surveys make it easy for respondents to manufacture fictional social realities without anyone knowing the difference (Markham, 1998). Of course, interviewers can deceive respondents by claiming to have experiences or characteristics that they do not have in hopes of establishing better rapport. They can feign responses for the same purpose by claiming "false nonverbals," for example, telling respondents that they "laughed at" or "were pained by" particular comments. Markham (1998), in her autoethnography of Internet interviewing, reported that electronic interviews take longer than their traditional counterparts and that responses are more cryptic and less in depth; however, the interviewer has time to phrase follow-up questions or probes properly.

It is also virtually impossible to preserve anonymity in Internet e-mail surveys, but chat rooms and similar sites permit the use of pseudonyms. Although electronic interviews are currently used primarily for quantitative research and usually employ structured questionnaires, it is only a matter of time before researchers adapt these techniques to qualitative work, just as they have adapted electronic techniques of data analysis. For example, Markham (1998) immersed herself in the process of engaging with various electronic or Internet formats (e.g., chat rooms, listservs) to interview other participants and to document her journey in the virtual world, learning the experience of cyberspace and the meanings that participants attached to their online lifestyles. She asked an intriguing question: "Can I have a self where my body does not exist?" (p. 8).

The future may see considerable ethnography by means of computer-mediated communication, where virtual space—rather than a living room or workplace—is the setting of the interview. It remains to be seen whether electronic interviewing will allow researchers to obtain "thick descriptions" or accounts of subjective experiences or whether such interviewing will provide the "process context" that is so important to qualitative interviews. In addition, researchers conducting such interviewing can never be sure that they are receiving answers from desired or eligible respondents. Interviewing by way of the Internet is so prominent today that researchers are studying its effects on response quality. Schaefer and Dillman (1998), for example, found that e-mail surveys achieved response rates similar to those of mail surveys but yielded better quality data in terms of item completion and more detailed responses to open-ended questions.

There are clearly many unanswered questions and problems related to the use of electronic interviewing. This mode of interviewing will obviously increase during the new millennium as people rely increasingly on electronic modes of communication. But just how much Internet communication will displace face-to-face interviewing is a matter that only time will tell.

■ CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have examined the interview, from structured types of interview to the interview as negotiated text. We outlined the history of interviewing, with its qualitative and quantitative origins. We looked at structured, group, and various types of unstructured interviewing. We examined the importance of gender in interviewing and the ways in which framing and interpreting affect interviews. We examined the importance of ethics in interviewing. Finally, we discussed the new trends in interviewing.

We have included discussion of the whole gamut of the interview, despite the fact that this book is concerned with qualitative research, because we believe that researchers must be cognizant of all the various types of interviews, both modern and postmodern, if they are to gain a clear understanding of interviewing. Clearly, certain types of interviewing are better suited to particular kinds of situations, and researchers *must be aware of the implications, pitfalls, and problems of the types of interview they choose*. If we wish to find out how many people oppose the establishment of a nuclear repository in their area, then a structured type of interview, such as that used in survey research, is our best tool; we can quantify and code the responses and can use mathematical models to explain our findings. If we are interested in opinions about a given product, then a focus group interview will provide us with the most efficient results. If we wish to know about the lives of Palestinian women in the resistance (Gluck, 1991), then we need to interview them at length and in depth in an unstructured way. In the first example just cited, and perhaps in the second, we can speak in the formal language of scientific rigor and verifiability of findings. In the third example, we can speak of understanding a negotiated way of life.

More scholars are realizing that to pit one type of interviewing against another is a futile effort—a leftover from the paradigmatic quantitative/qualitative hostility of past generations. Thus, an increasing number of researchers are using a multimethod approach to achieve broader and often

better results. This multimethod approach is referred to as *triangulation* (Denzin, 1989b; Flick, 1998) and allows researchers to use different methods in different combinations. For instance, group interviewing has long been used to complement survey research and is now being used to complement participant observation (Morgan, 1988). Humans are complex, and their lives are ever changing. The more methods we use to study them, the better our chances will be to gain some understanding of how they construct their lives and the stories they tell us about them.

The brief journey we have taken through the world of interviewing should allow us to be better informed about, and perhaps more sensitized to, the problematics of asking questions for sociological reasons. We must remember that each individual has his or her own social history and an individual perspective on the world. Thus, we cannot take our task for granted. As Oakley (1981) noted, "Interviewing is rather like a marriage: Everybody knows what it is, an awful lot of people do it, and yet behind each closed front door there is a world of secrets" (p. 41). She was quite correct. We all think that we know how to ask questions and talk to people, from common everyday folks to highly qualified quantophrenic experts. Yet to learn about people, we must treat them as people, and they will work with us to help us create accounts of their lives. So long as many researchers continue to treat respondents as unimportant faceless individuals whose only contributions are to fill more boxed responses, the answers that researchers will get will be commensurable with the questions they ask and the way in which they ask them. As researchers, we are no different from Gertrude Stein, who, while on her deathbed, asked her lifelong companion Alice B. Toklas, "What is the answer?" When Alice could not bring herself to speak, Gertrude asked, "In that case, what is the question?"

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